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Local Governance and Administrative Structure in Cholapuram

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Abstract

This paper examines the structure, functioning, and challenges of local governance in Cholapuram, a panchayat area situated in Rajapalayam Taluk, Virudhunagar District, Tamil Nadu. The study explores how the Panchayati Raj system operates at the grassroots level, emphasizing administrative organization, development planning, and citizen participation. It also highlights the role of local officials, the functioning of standing committees, and the impact of state and central government schemes on rural development. The study concludes with an assessment of governance effectiveness and recommendations for strengthening decentralized administration.

Keywords: Local Governance, Panchayati Raj, Cholapuram, Rajapalayam, Rural Administration, Development Planning

1. Introduction

Local governance in India serves as the foundation of democratic administration, ensuring public participation in decision-making and development. The Panchayati Raj system, introduced through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992), has institutionalized local self-governance in rural areas. Cholapuram, a semi-urban panchayat located near Rajapalayam in Virudhunagar District, provides an insightful case study into how local governance mechanisms function at the grassroots level. This study aims to analyze the administrative structure, roles of local representatives, coordination with higher administrative levels, and the impact of government schemes in Cholapuram.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the administrative setup and hierarchy of the Cholapuram Panchayat.
2. To analyze the functioning of local governance bodies and their responsibilities.
3. To identify the challenges faced in implementing rural development programmes.

3. Methodology

This study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It uses both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through interviews with Panchayat officials, ward members, and local people, while secondary data came from government reports, records from the Rajapalayam Taluk Office, and academic sources. The study focuses on Cholapuram Panchayat in Rajapalayam Taluk, Virudhunagar District, and uses observation, document analysis, and interviews to understand how local governance works in the area.

4. Historical Background of Cholapuram

Archaeological and literary evidence suggests that Cholapuram has a continuous history dating back over ten thousand years. The earliest traces of human settlement belong to the Middle Stone Age, when primitive humans used small stone tools for hunting along the banks of the Devi River. Archaeologists estimate that these tools date to around 10,000 years ago, indicating early human habitation in this region.

5. Stone Age and Early Civilization

During the Mesolithic (Neolithic) period, people in this area followed burial practices using large earthen pots—a tradition referenced in Sangam literature. Archaeological finds of

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polished black and red earthenware, particularly around the Shiva and Perumal temples and in the western parts of the town, confirm that the region was densely inhabited during the Sangam age. These findings provide insight into the continuity of human settlement and cultural evolution in Cholapuram.

6. Panchayat System under the British

Local self-government in India during British rule began modestly, with limited scope. The first municipal law, known as The Bengal People Act of 1842, was introduced as a pilot in Bengal Province, followed by Act XXVI of 1850, extending it across India.

Later, Lord Mayo's Resolution (1870) emphasized promoting education, public health, sanitation, and local works through participatory governance. However, it was Lord Ripon's Resolution of 1882 that marked the true beginning of local self-government in India, earning him the title "*Father of Local Self-Government*." His reforms encouraged the involvement of elected representatives in municipal administration and laid the foundation for modern Panchayati Raj. These developments gradually influenced rural administrative institutions, including those in Tamil Nadu, forming the base for the contemporary Panchayat system that functions in Cholapuram today.

7. Foreign Contact and Trade Links

Archaeological discoveries such as Roman coins and imported pottery found in and around Cholapuram shed light on the area's ancient trade connections. During the British period, several Roman gold coins, particularly from the reigns of Emperors Augustus and Tiberius, were unearthed near Nallur on the banks of the Nichepa River. These findings indicate that the region maintained international trade relations even before the Common Era, connecting South India with the Roman world through the port networks of the Tamil coast.

8. Administrative Structure of Cholapuram Panchayat

Cholapuram Panchayat functions under the administrative control of the Rajapalayam Panchayat Union within Virudhunagar District. It follows the three-tier Panchayati Raj system prescribed in Tamil Nadu, comprising the Village Panchayat at the grassroots, the Panchayat Union at the block level, and the District Panchayat at the district level. The Panchayat is headed by an elected President who oversees all administrative activities and development works. The Vice President assists in the President's duties, while ward members represent various wards, acting as intermediaries between citizens and the administration. A Panchayat Secretary maintains official records, financial accounts, and correspondence, ensuring accountability and transparency in governance.

9. Functions and Governance Practices

The Cholapuram Panchayat performs a wide range of essential functions such as maintaining roads, water supply systems, sanitation facilities, and street lighting. It implements major welfare and development schemes, including MGNREGS, PMAY-G, and Swachh Bharat Mission. Regular Gram Sabha meetings are conducted to encourage community participation, where citizens discuss local issues and monitor development activities. Women's representation has significantly improved due to the

reservation of seats, leading to gender-inclusive decision-making.

10. Financial Administration and Coordination

The Panchayat's finances are drawn from local taxes such as house and water taxes, along with grants from state and central governments. The Panchayat Secretary maintains financial accounts, which are audited annually by the Block Development Office (BDO). Coordination with higher administrative levels, including the Rajapalayam Panchayat Union and Rural Development Department, ensures proper implementation of development projects and adherence to financial norms.

11. Developmental Initiatives

The Cholapuram Panchayat has achieved notable progress in infrastructure and social welfare. The construction of concrete roads, drainage systems, and drinking water facilities has enhanced living conditions. Under Swachh Bharat Mission, sanitation awareness and household toilet construction have been promoted. Through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), women have been encouraged toward entrepreneurship and microfinance activities. Welfare schemes have also been extended to Scheduled Castes and marginalized communities, ensuring inclusive growth.

12. Challenges in Local Governance

Despite these achievements, Cholapuram Panchayat faces several challenges such as limited financial autonomy, delays in fund release, and shortages of technical staff. Public participation in Gram Sabha meetings remains low, and political interference sometimes affects equitable resource allocation. Maintenance of public assets also suffers from inadequate funding. Addressing these challenges is vital for improving governance efficiency.

13. Findings

The study finds that the Panchayat system in Cholapuram is effectively implementing most welfare schemes and delivering essential services. However, greater emphasis is needed on financial independence, digital governance, and citizen participation. The Panchayat's initiatives in women's empowerment and participatory democracy are commendable but require further strengthening.

14. Conclusion

The local governance system in Cholapuram reflects the core spirit of democratic decentralization envisioned by the 73rd Amendment. While the Panchayat has contributed significantly to public welfare, infrastructure, and inclusive governance, constraints related to finance, manpower, and public awareness persist. Strengthening Panchayati Raj through fiscal empowerment, digital tools, and civic engagement can transform Cholapuram into a model of sustainable rural governance.

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